Myrtle Creek Watershed Restoration
Environmental Assessment (EA # OR-105-02-05)
South River Field Office

Slide Creek Instream Restoration
Decision Documentation

Date Prepared: April 11, 2003

Decision:

It is my decision to authorize the placement of trees and logs in a portion of Slide Creek to create instream structure and habitat complexity. The project site is located on a 0.8-0.9 mile reach located on BLM-managed lands in T. 28 S., R. 4 W., Section 35, W.M. Field Office hydrology and fishery personnel identified the stream reach as lacking sufficient large wood. This lack of large wood has led to alteration of the sediment regime, channel incision and stream bank erosion. It has also led to the degradation of spawning and rearing habitat for anadromous and resident fish. The project is to be accomplished using Title II funds available through the "Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000."

Specifically, the project involves the placement of 28 log structures in Slide Creek. Fifty-five to sixty trees will be felled in the adjacent Riparian Reserve to provide logs for the structures. Positioning of the logs will be accomplished by felling trees directly into the stream, felling and winching logs or entire trees into place, or placing logs with an excavator. Limited excavation will be required to bury the ends of eight logs, keying them into the stream banks.

The following project design criteria and actions will be implemented:

- In areas of excavator work, scotch broom will be pulled prior to equipment entry and structure placement.

- All equipment will be pressure washed or steam cleaned prior to mobilization in and out of the project area in order to minimize the risk of introducing soil from outside the project area that may be contaminated with noxious weed seed.

- In-stream work will be restricted to the period between July 1 and September 15, during low summer flows, consistent with conditions of the General Authorization of the Oregon Division of State Lands, and under permit from the Oregon Department of Forestry.

- An absorbent containment boom will be placed downstream of the project site, prior to project commencement, to contain any inadvertent spillage of petroleum products.

- Excavator access from the 28-4-34.0 road to Slide Creek will be limited to an existing road and a grassy bench beside the stream.

Rationale for the Decision:

This project was analyzed under Alternative 1, the proposed action, of the Myrtle Creek Watershed Restoration EA. Its implementation will meet the objectives of restoring normal stream function and aggrading the channel. It will also improve aquatic habitat conditions by providing for longer retention of suitably-sized spawning substrates and creation of complex pool habitat for rearing and sheltering resident and anadromous fish. Alternative 2, the no action alternative, would not meet these objectives.

The placement of the instream structures in Slide Creek will not result in any undue environmental degradation. The project is consistent with Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives contained in the ROD/RMP (pp. 20-21). Specifically, the project will aid in the maintenance and restoration of in-stream flows; maintenance and restoration of the natural sediment regime; and maintenance and restoration of aquatic habitat. The project also implements management direction to restore stream channel complexity (ROD/RMP, p. 20).

The project site was surveyed for vascular and non-vascular plants listed under the Survey and Manage program (EA, p. 15). The lichen (*Ramalina thrausta*) was identified in a dozen locations, primarily in small openings along the stream and roadside. This lichen favors a moist microclimate and grows on the branches of conifer and hardwood trees, and on understory shrubs. The scattered felling of 55-60 trees along Slide Creek is not expected to affect the identified sites. In addition, to the benefit of the lichen, the formation of a floodplain and an increased water table associated with aggradation of the stream is expected to enhance habitat conditions by creating a cooler and moister climate during the summer months.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has identified a set of soil series considered to be potential habitat for Kincaid's lupine (*Lupinus sulphureus var. kincaidii*), a Federally-threatened species. The project area does not contain any of these soil types. As a consequence, the site is not considered to be suitable habitat and surveys are not required. Absent suitable habitat, the lupine is not expected to be present and, therefore, would not be affected by the project.

The project site is located in suitable habitat for the Federally-threatened northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*), but is not within ¼-mile of any owl activity center or Critical Habitat Unit. Although trees felled for structures would be up to 24 inches in diameter at breast height, they would be dispersed throughout the project area and selected to exclude trees with suitable nesting structure and characteristics. As a consequence, the effects to owl habitat would be negligible and considered as not likely to adversely affect the species.

Slide Creek provides spawning and rearing habitat for the Federally-threatened Oregon coast coho salmon and Oregon Coast steelhead trout, a species proposed for listing as Federally-threatened. Its lower reaches are also designated as Essential Fish Habitat. The effects of on these species and Essential Fish Habitat are primarily derived from sediment generated by the disturbance of stream banks and stream channels in association with tree felling and winching, and instream excavator operation to place and key in logs. These effects were determined as "likely to adversely affect" coho salmon and Essential Fish Habitat.

Actions of this nature were programmatically consulted with NOAA Fisheries, formerly known as the National Marine Fisheries Service. The findings of NOAA Fisheries are addressed in *Endangered Species Act – Section 7 and Magnuson-Stevens Act Essential Fish Habitat Consultation Programmatic Biological and Conference Opinion for Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, and BIA/Coquille Indian Tribe Programmatic Activities Affecting SONC Coho Salmon, OC Coho Salmon, and OC Steelhead*, dated October 18, 2002.

The Biological and Conference Opinion sets forth Reasonable and Prudent Measures, and Terms and Conditions, in conjunction with authorization of Incidental Take. This project implements the Reasonable and Prudent Measures and is consistent with Terms and Conditions of the Biological and Conference Opinion.

No issues were identified by local or tribal governments, State agencies, or other Federal agencies.

The EA and Finding of No Significant Impact were made available for public review from February 11, 2003, through March 13, 2003. Comments were received from two organizations. With the exception of the comment addressed below, these comments did not constitute new information or identify any issues not already considered and addressed in the Myrtle Creek Watershed Restoration EA, the ROD/RMP, or the Roseburg District *Proposed Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*. One comment pertinent to this project does, however, merit a response.

It was suggested in the comments from one organization that the BLM should use a helicopter or Spider to place logs in Slide Creek, rather than operating ". . . a tired or treaded excavator along the stream."

A helicopter was not considered feasible or desirable for the following reasons. There is a road in close proximity to Slide Creek, and available access from the road to the stream. The use of a helicopter would add to the cost of the project with the effect of requiring it to be scaled back. Helicopter placement would not achieve the desired precision, requiring additional ground work to winch each logs into its final position. It is also probable that rotor wash from the helicopter would knock limbs and tops out of trees. This would have an effect on wildlife that utilize the habitat, and would also reduce streamside shading important for the maintenance of cool water temperatures.

Spiders are relatively expensive and specialized pieces of equipment. Excavators are widely available and standard contracting equipment.

The stream channel in which the excavator will be operating is scoured to bedrock so there is no potential or concern that the equipment would crush or compact fragile gravel substrates. An excavator is also needed in order to bury the ends of a portion of the logs in the stream banks, thus it is the most reasonable choice of equipment.

Compliance Monitoring:

Monitoring would be done in accordance with the ROD/RMP, Appendix I (pp. 84, 190, 193, & 195-199), with emphasis on the following resources: Riparian Reserves; Water and Soils; Wildlife Habitat; Fish Habitat; and Special Status and SEIS Special Attention Species Habitat.

Protest Procedures:

As outlined in 43 CFR § 5003 - Administrative Remedies, protests may be filed with the authorized officer within 15 days of the publication date of the Decision Notice in *The News*-Review, Roseburg, Oregon.

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Joseph V. Ross Date
Acting Field Manager
South River Field Office